

### Cruise Weekly today

Cruise Weekly today features four pages of all the latest cruise news.

### Explora Hilton tie-up

**EXPLORA** Journeys and Hilton Hotels & Resorts have announced a partnership, debuting Hilton Honors Adventures, which will allow members of the hoteliers' rewards program to earn and redeem points with the line.

In the northern summer of 2026, Hilton Honors members will be able to earn and redeem points on Explora cruises, with a special offer currently available.

The launch deal will provide 100,000 Hilton Honors Bonus Points rewarded per suite, through to 07 Jun.

Hilton Honors members will be able to earn and redeem points on all Explora cruises.

## FCTG continues cruise acquisition spree

**FLIGHT** Centre Travel Group (FCTG) has acquired cruise business Iglu to accelerate its growth in the sector.

The United Kingdom-based online travel agency will change hands following a £100 million upfront payment, with an additional £27 million in performance-based earnouts possible - the acquisition will be funded through cash and existing debt facilities.

FCTG said the purchase adds a scalable digital platform with omni-channel capabilities to the company's global network, as well as broader access to the UK, which is the world's third-largest cruise market.

The company has been heavily investing in both the cruise sector and the UK market, acquiring another online-based business, Cruise Club UK, just over 12 months ago (**CW** 30 Oct 2024).



Annualised cruise-related TTV for FCTG is now predicted to top \$2 billion during FY26, two years ahead of schedule.

Iglu has an attractive margin profile, boasting a 3.1% FY25 EBITDA margin versus 2.2% across FCTG's leisure division.

The OTA currently captures more than 15% of British cruise bookings, and more than 75% of online bookings.

FCTG also expects the acquisition to increase its buying power, deliver immediate shareholder benefits, and be EPS-accretive in FY26, with

further synergies and "strong growth potential" available in the medium-term.

"This acquisition delivers immediate shareholder value through EPS accretion and is a game-changer in terms of the future opportunities it unlocks in the global cruise market," FCTG Managing Director Graham Turner said.

"Iglu brings a strong brand and a scalable technology platform that aligns with [FCTG's] strategic objectives," he added.

A circa 3% increase to \$315 million-\$350 million is expected for FCTG's profit guidance this year, to reflect Iglu's contribution to underlying profit before tax.

Cruise is one of FCTG's fastest-growing leisure sectors, with sales increasing 15-20% year-on-year.

This is thanks to a resilient customer base and a supply chain with heavy investment. **MS**

"It's real exploration, an expedition."

*Philip*

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## Viking QAGOMA pact

**VIKING** has announced a partnership with the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) to support its highly anticipated exhibition, Olafur Eliasson: Presence.

The partnership, which commenced late last week, creates fresh opportunities between Viking and QAGOMA, allowing the pair to engage new audiences within Australia's vibrant arts community, while celebrating shared values of creativity, curiosity and exploration.

"Partnering with QAGOMA for this powerful exhibition feels like a natural extension of what we stand for at Viking," MD Michelle Black said.

"We are proud to support an exhibition that encourages people to pause, reflect and experience art in ways that resonate long after they leave the gallery."

## Seeker godmother

**WINDSTAR** Cruises has named Libby Anschutz, daughter of the line's owner Phil Anschutz, as Godmother of its new ship *Star Seeker*.

The cruise line is currently putting the final touches on *Seeker*, which will be the first of two new all-suite yachts joining its fleet.

*Seeker* began sea trials in Portugal in 23 Oct.

## Oceania Riviera's Sydney debut



**OCEANIA** Cruises' *Oceania Riviera* (pictured) has made her debut in Australia, commencing her first season of voyages in the country (CW 03 Dec).

The 1,250-guest ship arrived in Fremantle, Western Australia, late last month, and will immerse guests in the local culinary scene through a broad array of small-group shore excursions including visits to local markets, rice fields, and truffle farms.

The 2026 season will run through to Mar, featuring a diverse selection of itineraries ranging from 14 to 35 days, with departures from multiple ports across the region.

Voyages will also visit hidden gems like Mystery Island in Vanuatu, Dunedin in New Zealand, and Kangaroo Island in SA, as well as iconic ports such as

Sydney, where *Riviera* made her first call yesterday.

The ship welcomed more than 100 trade partners for a tour and lunch in venues such as Jacques and the main dining room.

Chief Luxury Officer Jason Montague said Oceania is excited to have finally brought *Riviera* Down Under.

"This new chapter reflects our commitment to offering exceptional, immersive experiences that celebrate the region's diverse cultures and breathtaking landscapes," Montague said.

"*Riviera's* voyages will offer travellers an unmatched opportunity to savour the finest local cuisine while exploring some of the world's most iconic destinations in unparalleled comfort and style." MS

## Zuiderdam update

**HOLLAND** America Line's *Zuiderdam* has debuted new features ahead of her Caribbean season.

Enhancements have been made to *Zuiderdam's* Crow's Nest cocktail bar, while the ship has also had staterooms added and decor refreshed as part of her two-week dry dock in the Bahamas.

*Zuiderdam* is now back in service, with guests embarking the Vista-class ship in Miami late last week.

The Crow's Nest now features a newly added bandstand stage designed for intimate performances.

Holland America also upgraded the ship's lighting and audio systems to host small-scale live music, lectures, narration and speaking engagements, creating a venue for guests to enjoy enriching experiences in a relaxed setting with panoramic views.

One of the most significant updates during *Zuiderdam's* dry dock was the addition of 11 ocean view staterooms on decks 1 and 7.

The refresh also included new carpeting in all verandah staterooms on decks 5 through 10, as well as in Neptune, Signature and Pinnacle suites.

Verandah staterooms on deck 8 received full bathroom updates, including new vanities, mirrors, and more.



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Thu 11th December 2025

## Douglas Mawson dazzles in Sydney

**MICHAEL** Heath and the Aurora Expeditions team recently christened their third ship, *Douglas Mawson*, at the Overseas Passenger Terminal in Sydney.

Marking the company's 35th anniversary, co-founders Greg and Margaret Mortimer hosted a shakedown voyage to Hobart, joined by travel partners, staff and VIPs.

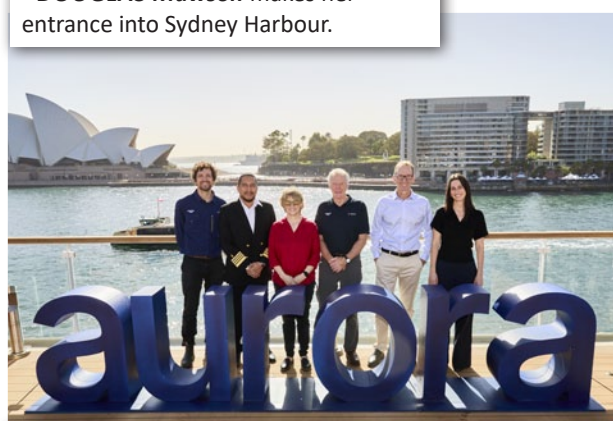
On full display for all to see was the vessel's X-BOW hull and advanced sustainable technologies as the ship made her way down the east coast.

It was particularly special to have Greg Mortimer as part of the expedition team - guests were treated to a taste of expedition cruising with a day of Zodiac safaris, hiking to the Wineglass Bay Lookout, kayaking in the Freycinet Peninsula, and more.

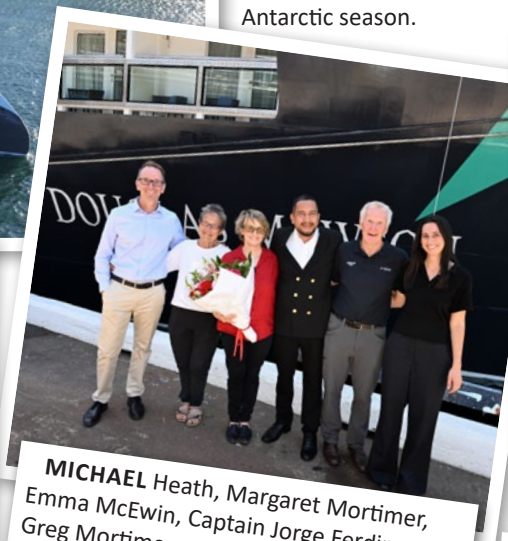
*Douglas Mawson* has now completed her circumnavigation of Tasmania, and has embarked on her inaugural 2025-26 Antarctic season.



**DOUGLAS Mawson** makes her entrance into Sydney Harbour.



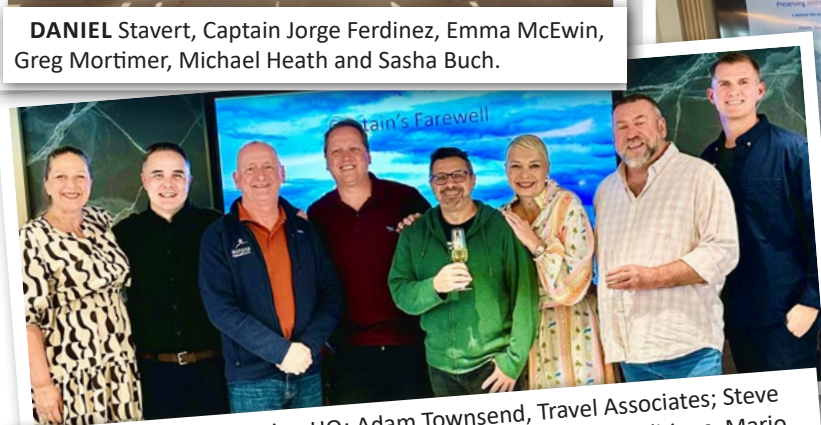
**DANIEL** Stavert, Captain Jorge Ferdinez, Emma McEwin, Greg Mortimer, Michael Heath and Sasha Buch.



**MICHAEL** Heath, Margaret Mortimer, Emma McEwin, Captain Jorge Ferdinez, Greg Mortimer, and Sasha Buch.



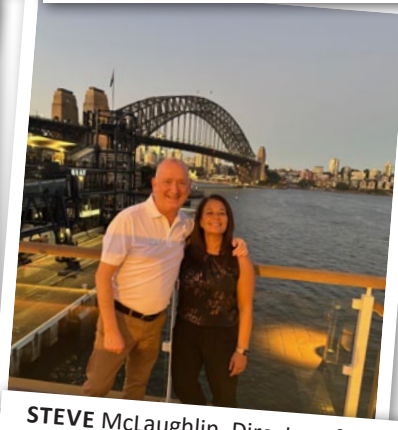
**FOUNDER** Greg Mortimer joined the expedition team.



**KIRILLY** Plum, Destination HQ; Adam Townsend, Travel Associates; Steve McLaughlin, Aurora Expeditions; David Tanguay, Aurora Expeditions; Mario Paez, Planetdwellers; Nikki Glading, The Luxury Travel Collection; Barry Warner, Planetdwellers; and Phil Smethurst, Bicton Travel.



**GREG** Holland, Chair of Mawson's Huts Foundation.



**STEVE** McLaughlin, Director of Sales APAC and Amelya Grey, Senior BDM APAC at Aurora Expeditions.



**SHANE** Keating, CounterCurrent founder & CEO with Sasha Buch, Aurora Expeditions' Sustainability Manager.



**GREG** and Margaret Mortimer, Aurora Expeditions co-founders.



**PHIL** Smethurst, Bicton Travel; Nikki Glading, The Luxury Travel Collection; Kirilly Plum, Destination HQ; Adam Townsend, Travel Associates.





**MORE** than 12,000 guests will be joining Carnival Cruise Line for Christmas, and the brand is gearing up to celebrate like it means it.

This holiday season will see guests pop around 10,000 bottles of champagne while tucking into roughly 25 tonnes of Australian meat.

On the menu will also be 32 tonnes of fresh fish and seafood; 168,000 fresh eggs; 350 tonnes of Australian-grown fresh fruit and vegetables; and 25,000 of Carnival's signature melting chocolate cakes.

## That's quite a pickle

**PICKLEBALL** has made its debut on Carnival Corporation's Relax Away, Half Moon Cay private destination. Holland America Line, which boasts a partnership with the Professional Pickleball Association (*CW* 19 Dec 2022), led the debut of the four new courts, which are the only such facilities on a cruise line's private island.

Passengers from *Rotterdam* and *Eurodam* tried the courts out for the first time last week.



## Virgin launches status match

**RICHARD** Branson and his cruise line are encouraging those not feeling the love from their favourite brand to "set sail the Virgin way", launching what it is being called the "world's broadest status match program".

Virgin is extending instant status recognition to about 50 million travellers who hold high-tier status with more than 35 cruise loyalty programs, as well as air and hotel travellers, rewarding them with its Blue Extras perks.

The cruise line's enhanced status match is eligible across cruise loyalty programs including Royal Caribbean's Crown and Anchor Society, Norwegian Cruise Line's Latitudes Rewards, and Carnival Cruise Line's VIFP Club.

Other brands and their loyalty programs included are Azamara, Celebrity Cruises, Disney Cruise Line, Holland America Line, MSC Cruises, Oceania Cruises, P&O Cruises, Princess Cruises, and Windstar Cruises.

Loyalty programs recognised from across the travel industry include Qantas Airways' Frequent Flyer, Virgin Australia's Velocity, program, Marriott International's Marriott Bonvoy, Hilton Hotels & Resorts' Hilton Honors, Hyatt Hotels & Resorts' World of Hyatt, and IHG Hotels & Resorts' IHG One Rewards.

Those who apply for Virgin's status match now through 16 Jan and book a voyage by 31 Mar can snag Blue Extras, which entitles cruisers to premium



coffees at The Grounds Club, complimentary laundry service, exclusive cocktail events, and personalised support for embarkation to disembarkation.

Blue Extras also provide access to special deals and entry into Virgin's global rewards program.

"If you've stayed loyal to brands that promised to reward wanderlust but feel like you aren't being valued as much as you used to, jump on board Virgin Voyages because they're ready to show you what it feels like when a brand loves you back," the cruise line said. *MS*

## RCI Caribbean '27

**ROYAL** Caribbean has expanded its seasonal line-up of 2027-28 Caribbean adventures from both Florida and New Orleans.

A line-up of 13 Royal Caribbean ships, including *Legend of the Seas* and *Allure of the Seas*, will sail from seven ports across the season.

Other ships set to sail in the region during the season include *Freedom of the Seas*, *Adventure of the Seas*, and *Enchantment of the Seas*.

Travellers can choose from a range of three- to nine-night adventures, including visits to the line's Perfect Day at CocoCay in The Bahamas and Royal Beach Clubs in Paradise Island, as well as Cozumel, which opens next year.

Destinations include the Dominican Republic, with its lush jungles and the famous Cascada Limon waterfall.

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[info@cruiseweekly.com.au](mailto:info@cruiseweekly.com.au)

### ADVERTISING & MARKETING

Head of Sales & Marketing - Sean Harrigan  
Business Development Manager  
Kara Stanley  
[advertising@cruiseweekly.com.au](mailto:advertising@cruiseweekly.com.au)

### GENERAL MANAGER & PUBLISHER

Matthew Vince

### ACCOUNTS

[accounts@traveldaily.com.au](mailto:accounts@traveldaily.com.au)

Suite 1, Level 2, 64 Talavera Rd  
Macquarie Park NSW 2113 Australia  
PO Box 1010 Epping NSW 1710 Australia  
Tel: (AU) +61 2 8007 6760 or (NZ) 0800 799 220  
Tel: (Int'l) 1300 799 220